

## Message Text

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15

ACTION ORM-02

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 EA-07 IO-13 ISO-00 DHA-02 CIAE-00

FBIE-00 INSE-00 NSAE-00 DODE-00 INR-07 PA-01 USIA-06

PRS-01 SP-02 VO-03 SY-05 DEAE-00 SS-15 NSC-05 /082 W

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R 010833Z SEP 76

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2803

INFO USMISSION GENEVA

USUN NEW YORK 1695

AMCONGEN HONG KONG

AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY OTTAWA

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: SREF, PFOR, MY, TH

SUBJECT: INDOCHINESE REFUGEE BOAT CASES

REF: (A) KUALA LUMPUR 4966 (B) GENEVA 6892 (C) SINGAPORE 4099

SUMMARY: EMBASSY BANGKOK AGREES WITH SUGGESTION OF EMBASSY  
KUALA LUMPUR (REF A) THAT THERE IS VALUE IN SEEKING TO  
ATTRACT INTERNATIONAL PRESS INTEREST TO PLIGHT OF INDO-CHINA  
REFUGEES ARRIVING ON BOATS. WE HAVE INITIAL IMPRESSION THAT  
AMERICAN REGIONAL JOURNALISTS BASED IN BANGKOK HAVE ENCOUNTERED  
RESISTANCE FROM THEIR HEADQUARTERS IN U.S. TO STORIES ON INDO-  
CHINA REFUGEES, BUT WE WILL MAKE DISCREET SOUNDINGS ON THE  
IDEA. THERE IS A RISK, HOWEVER, THAT JOURNALISTS WILL SIMPLY  
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FOCUS ON THAI PERFORMANCE AND WILL NOT CONSIDER MALAYSIAN

AND SINGAPOREAN PERFORMANCE AS WELL. WE WONDER IF THERE WOULD BE VALUE IN INCLUDING THIS SUBJECT IN THE SECRETARY'S FORTHCOMING UNGA SPEECH IN THE GENERAL DEBATE. END SUMMARY.

1. WE BELIEVE EMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR'S SUGGESTIONS TO (A) BACKGROUND REGIONAL AMERICAN JOURNALISTS HERE ON CALLOUSNESS OF POLICY OF SOME GOVERNMENTS ON BOAT PROBLEM, AND (B) TO HAVE UNSYG MAKE A PUBLIC STATEMENT ON THE QUESTION (REF A), ARE VERY GOOD AND SHOULD RECEIVE PROMPT CONSIDERATION.

2. ALTHOUGH WE ARE NOT IN POSITION TO ADVISE ON THE SECOND POINT, EMBASSY CANNOT HELP BUT WONDER HOW MUCH INTEREST THERE WOULD BE AMONG AMERICAN PRESS CORPS HERE IN THE STORY. ALL COMPLAIN OF PROBLEMS GETTING THEIR PAPERS TO RUN ANYTHING ON REFUGEES ANY LONGER. GEORGE MCARTHUR OF LOS ANGELES TIMES, PROBABLY THE MOST SYMPATHETIC OF THE JOURNALISTS, HAS RECENTLY DONE AN ARTICLE ON PROBLEMS OF THOSE WHO HAVE LEFT VIET-NAM BY BOAT; WE DO NOT KNOW WHETHER HE WOULD THINK IT WORTHWHILE DOING ANOTHER AT THIS POINT. HOWEVER, EMBASSY WILL DISCREETLY SOUND OUT JOURNALISTS LIKE MCARTHUR TO DETERMINE LEVEL OF INTEREST IN SUCH A STORY AND ADVISE FURTHER.

3. THERE IS A RISK, HARD TO EVALUATE IN ADVANCE OF TRYING THIS INITIATIVE OUT, THAT JOURNALISTS BASED IN BANGKOK WILL SIMPLY FOCUS ON THAI PERFORMANCE AND WILL NOT RPT NOT CONSIDER MALAYSIAN AND SINGAPOREAN EXPERIENCE. ALTHOUGH RTG ATTITUDE TO DATE HAS BEEN RELATIVELY GOOD IN ACCEPTING THE BOATS, IT COULD CHANGE. EVEN UNDER PRESENT POLICY, JOURNALISTS CAN FIND ENOUGH TO CRITICIZE WITHOUT LOOKING FARTHER AFIELD. THEY NEED GO NO FARTHER THAN SAMUT PRAKAN ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF BANGKOK TO VISIT 116 VIETNAMESE REFUGEES WHO HAVE ARRIVED ON BOATS, SOME AS LONG AS NINE MONTHS AGO, AND HAVE BEEN CONFINED TO THEM EVER SINCE. THAI HAVE ACCEPTED, IF GRUDGINGLY, LARGE NUMBER OF INDO-CHINESE REFUGEES AND HAVE NOT BEEN AS CALLOUS AS MALAYSIAN AND SINGAPOREAN GOVERNMENTS HAVE BEEN. SITUATION IS SUFFICIENTLY TENUOUS HERE THAT WE MAY FIND PRESS ATTENTION ON THAI HANDLING OF BOAT CASES COULD JUST RESULT IN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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INCREASING POPULAR PRESSURE ON RTG TO STOP RECEIVING THE BOATS.

4. EMBASSY UNDERSTANDS FROM ONE OF THE PARTICIPANTS IN UNHCR REGIONAL MEETING HERE, NOW ENTERING ITS THIRD DAY, THAT BOAT QUESTION HAS GENERATED CONSIDERABLE DISCUSSION TO DATE. WE CONTINUE TO BELIEVE UNHCR MUST TAKE STRONGEST STAND POSSIBLE ON THIS MATTER. DISCUSSION WITH HIGH

COMMISSIONER REPORTED REF B WAS HIGHLY ENCOURAGING, IN OUR VIEW. ON THE OTHER HAND, IF UNHCR EFFORTS CARRY LITTLE WEIGHT, AS HAS BEEN SUGGESTED IN THE CASE OF SINGAPORE LIJESSCGLN PERHAPS PUBLIC STATEMENTS BY INTERESTED GOVERNMENTS COULD BE HELPFUL.

5. WE WONDER IF WHOLE ISSUE MIGHT USEFULLY BE INCLUDED IN SECRETARY'S FORTHCOMING SPEECH IN GENERAL DEBATE AT THE UNGA. POINT COULD USEFULLY BE MADE THAT THE BULK OF THE INDO-CHINA REFUGEES HAVE LEFT THEIR COUNTRIES AND ONLY SMALL NUMBERS WILL BE COMING OUT IN THE FUTURE, AS INTERNAL POLICE CONTROLS IN THE INDO-CHINA COUNTRIES ARE TIGHTENED. IN TERMS OF HIGH ANNUAL BIRTH RATES IN COUNTRIES NEIGHBORING INDO-CHINA, ADDITIONAL NUMBER OF REFUGEES ADDS VERY LITTLE TO BURDENS OF COUNTRIES FIRST RESORTED TO BY THOSE LEAVING INDO-CHINA.  
BURKE

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## Message Attributes

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